

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JOHN - PART XIX

THE RENEWED PROMISE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT AND RESULTING POWER AND JOY

I. The next part of the Last Supper discourse repeats the themes of the beginning, with Jesus saying He will depart, but send the Holy Spirit to strengthen the Apostles and fill them with joy.

A. Jesus speaks of the sending of the Spirit to keep them from falling away (scandelistheta) when the predicted persecutions come.

1. Part of the idea is that the Spirit will help them through the persecutions. It is noteworthy that, after the sending of the spirit at Pentecost, they are able to stand up to the powers of the world.

2. In addition, when the evil comes (i.e., them being put out of synagogues and even killed) they will know that He predicted it all along would make it a part of His plan. See also John 13:19, 14:29. The persecutions would lead to the spread of the Gospel. See, e.g., Acts 2:22-24, 8:1-3, 28:30-31.

3. Jesus' prediction reminds one of the final prophesy of Isaiah, which says that those who hate and reject the faithful of God, precisely because of His name, will challenge the faithful to show them God's glory. The challenge will be followed by great sufferings, but then the birth of a new Jerusalem. See Isaiah 66:5ff

4. Earlier, Jesus asked whether His Bread of Life discourse would cause the disciples to fall away (skandelizei.) See John 6:61. The Eucharist, the power of the Spirit, and the persecutions are all connected.

- During the Roman persecutions, Christians were accused of cannibalism because of misrepresentations of the Mass. In addition, in persecutions generally, persecutors above all try to target the Mass.

- Immediately after Pentecost, the disciples gather for, among other things "the breading of bread," the earliest way of referring to the Mass. Acts 2:42. And immediately after his teachings on the Eucharist, St. Paul refers to the unity amidst diverse people and gifts that the Spirit brings. See 1 Cor. 12:1-11. This unity will be a central theme of the last part of the Last Supper discourse. See John 17.

B. Jesus again says He will depart. However, unlike the first time, when the Apostles were asking questions, Jesus says that they do not question Him now, but are filled with a silent sadness.

1. Earlier Saints Peter and Thomas had questioned Him about where He was going and He gave them answers indicating their mission, not the place where He was going. But the questions apparently did not continue.

2. Ironically enough, they do not ask about what will bring them joy, that Jesus will gather the dead and bring them to heaven. Nor do they comprehend the sending of the Spirit, which will give them a taste of heaven even on earth.

- The Apostles are still so eager for an earthly Messianic kingdom that they still do not really focus on the final goal. Thus, they are saddened at the loss of their more obvious and material consolation. God often draws people to greater things precisely through the loss of lesser things, including things that are in themselves good.

C. Jesus then indicates that, precisely because He is going back to the Father He will send the Spirit. There is a question of why He would not send the Spirit earlier.

1. The Spirit in Himself was certainly present, for the Persons of the Trinity never act without each other. See, e.g., John 1:31-34. However, the Apostles could not receive the fullness of the power and perception of the Spirit until Jesus died, rose again, and ascended into heaven.

- They would receive the Spirit in part right after the resurrection, for example, when Jesus gives them the ability to forgive sins. See John 20:21-23.

- It would be at Pentecost that they would receive more in the fullness of the power of the Spirit.

2. Part of the reason is that, until one is willing to understand the self-sacrificing love of God, as shown on the Cross, and the need to imitate it, one cannot receive the Spirit. In addition, the focus of the Spirit would be to bring people to the vision of heaven, with earthly power as a means to that end. Until Jesus died, rose again, and ascended into heaven, the Apostles would not be prepared for the power of the Spirit.

- Simon the magician thought of the power of the Spirit in earthly terms and Peter said he was filled with iniquity. See Acts 8:18-24.

D. Jesus then describes how the Spirit, the Advocate and Consoler for those who believe in Jesus, becomes the prosecutor for those who refuse. The ways Jesus describes the Spirit as acting are open to several different interpretations. This passage is likely meant to make the reader think about the ways in which the Spirit will act.

1. The Spirit convicts the world with regard to sin because the world (again meaning people attached to the things of the world) refuse to believe in Jesus.

- Jesus has already said that refusal to believe in Him when He has made Himself clear results in sin. See, e.g., John 8:24; 15:22. Jesus is making it clear that there are sins of the intellect as well as of action. This refusal of faith is in some sense the ultimate sin, for it precludes the forgiveness of all others.

2. The Spirit will convict the world because of righteousness because Jesus will not be seen by it. Part of the idea may be that doing what is right for one who is not visibly present proves righteousness. See, e.g., Matt. 6:1-18. The faith in things unseen likewise leads to righteousness. See, e.g., Heb. 11:1, 39-40.

- In addition, because He is sending the spirit, the righteousness of His believers will convict the world. What was perhaps most persuasive to the pagan Roman Empire was the fact that, despite the opposition of the world, the early Christians lived a just life that the pagan philosophers only spoke of.

3. The Spirit will convict the world with regard to condemnation because the ruler of the world, i.e., the devil, has been condemned. By extension, all who seek the glory of the world above all else are already condemned.

- Even only hours away from His arrest, Jesus states that the ruler of the world has been condemned. John again presents Jesus as knowing He is fully in charge.

- Part of the idea is that, because the world is subject to death, all who reject Christ because of the values of the world are condemned.

E. Jesus then promises positively that the Spirit will lead his disciples to all truth, past, present and future.

1. The idea is that, as they and by extension the Church, can understand more truths, the Spirit will reveal them. The Church Fathers often compare the growth in understanding of revealed truth to a tree or a human body. It remains the same in essence to what it was, but it grows in extent.

- Thus, for example, when the Spirit came to the disciples at Pentecost, they were able to interpret the Hebrew Scriptures and apply them to their time. See, e.g., Acts 2:16-36, 3:12-26, 7:1-53. They were also able to make decisions when new issues arose. See, e.g., Acts 6:1-7, 10:9-43, 15:1-21. They were also able to sense the course of world events, discern the meaning of their current struggles, and understand more the end goal, as revealed especially in the Book of Revelation.

- There would also be some specific prophecies of future events, at the Spirit's decision not man's. See, e.g., Acts 10:1-8, 11:27-30, 21:10-11; see also 2 Peter 2:21.

2. Here, Jesus presents more Himself as sending the Spirit as He is sent from the Father. The fact that all three share the same nature is implied when Jesus says that everything of the Father is His and the Holy Spirit glorifies Jesus as Jesus glorifies the Father.

- Part of the idea is also that the spread of the Church under the guidance of the spirit will give greater glory to Jesus on earth, or more precisely, will allow the earth to see more of the glory of Jesus.

- The proof of the Spirit is truth and good works. The Spirit will ever be consistent with truth already known and will bear witness by the fruits of the Spirit. See, e.g., Matt. 7:15-20; Gal. 1:8-9, 5:22. Deceit is one clear mark of the false spirit. See, e.g., John 8:44.

3. The Spirit speaks in Scripture, through the Church, through charisms given to individuals and to each person, especially in prayer and in exercising the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

II. Jesus then returns to the theme of His departure, and makes it clearer that: (1) His departure will be more a matter of not being seen than not being present; and (2) He will depart, return again for awhile, and then depart again.

A. Jesus does not explain exactly what He means, but instead picks up the image of a woman in labor to describe the situation of the disciples as the Church is becoming manifest to the world, and the Church herself as bringing new life.

1. Isaiah and Micah had all spoken of Israel in exile as a woman in labor, but the implication was that there would be a glorious birth of a new people. See Is. 26:16-19, Micah 4:10-5:4.

2. This passage is an application of the overall theme of sorrows at evil times resulting in joy at the restoration. See, e.g., Is. 61:2; Jer. 31:13, Matt. 5:5:4; Rev. 21:4.

3. Curiously, Isaiah also prophesies of a time in which a new people will be born, but in a single day and without labor pains. See Is. 66:7-9. He could be speaking of the Blessed Virgin Mary giving birth to Jesus, of the Church becoming manifest to the world at Pentecost, or of the baptism of each person.

4. Before his prophesy of the outpouring of the Spirit, Jeremiah also speaks of an era in which mourning will be turned to joy and a new and just reign is established. Jer. 31:7-30. Jeremiah then speaks of a time when God will write His covenant upon the people's hearts and they will know the Lord. Jer. 31:31-34.

B. Jesus then again assures the disciples that they would have their prayers in Jesus' name answered, but adds that they will also be taught directly by the Father in a manner beyond figures of speech.

1. Jesus tells them that, up to that time, they had not asked anything in His name. The disciples had cast out demons in the name of Jesus, and had made at least one unsuccessful attempt to do so. See, e.g., Mark 6:13, 9:18.

2. Jesus could mean that they have only done what they had received specific instructions to do. Now they would set forth more using their own intellect and initiative, still of course with the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

3. "Nothing" could also mean nothing compared to what they could achieve. He is calling them to be bolder and more joyful in the Lord, especially insofar as they will set forth to all the world. The spread of the Gospel will give them great joy. See, e.g., 1 John 1:4, 2 John 12.

4. The implication is that, as much as one is living the life of Jesus, His prayers will be answered. See James 5:16; 1 Peter 3:12; 1 John 3:21-22, 5:15. However, on earth this condition is rarely fulfilled completely

5. The prophets had spoken of a time in which people would not be taught in the figures of prophesy, but rather be able to understand God more directly. Is. 54:13; Jer. 31:31-34. Jesus is indicating that these prophesies are about to be fulfilled. See also Heb. 1:1-4 Moses had wanted a day in which all the people would be filled with the spirit of prophesy, and Joel said that that day was coming. See Num. 11:29; Joel 3:1-2.

- Part of the idea is that each person will have a sense of God Himself and be able to come to an elevated understanding of God.
 - Because we are not fully in tuned with God, we still need the doctrines of the Church, for the human intellect is fallible. See, e.g., 1 Peter 1:16-2:22.

C. When Jesus says He came from the Father and is now going back to Him, the apostles think they at last understand Him.

1. They still seem to be thinking primarily in terms of Jesus as a prophet, revealing what He knows from God to them.

2. Jesus, however, indicates that they still do not fully believe, for their courage is not perfect. They are still the stumbling band that they were, and will be until He returns to them and send the Spirit to them.

3. Jesus quotes from the prophesy of Zechariah that the shepherd will be struck and the people scattered. Zech. 13:7-9. This prophesy is between the vision of the outpouring the spirit upon all mankind such that there will be no need of further prophets (at least in the old sense of the term) and the establishment of the new Jerusalem.

- The striking of the shepherd and resulting destruction will test the people; those who persevere through fire will found the new and glorious Jerusalem. See Zech. 14.

4. The prophesy of Zechariah does not imply that there will no longer be any prophets. Rather he condemns the future prophets who would seek out a privileged vision, premised on the view that only a select few can arrive at the mysteries of the kingdom of God. See 1 Cor. 12:28-29, 13:9; 1 Thess 5:19; 1 Pet. 1:20-2:1

5. Again, Jesus makes this prediction strangely enough to give them comfort that He is in control of the situation and that even the persecutions will work to His glory and the salvation of His disciples.